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PATENT APPLICATION OF
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ENTITLED
PROCESS DEVICE WITH LOOP OVERRIDE

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PROCESS DEVICE WITH LOOP OVERRIDE

The present application is a continuation-in-part of and claims priority of U.S. patent application Serial No. 10/635,944, filed August 7, 5 2003 the content of which is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to process devices of the type used in industrial processes. 10 More particularly, the present invention relates to devices which control electrical current in a process control loop of such process devices.

Field devices such as process controllers, monitors and transmitters, are used in the process 15 control industry to remotely control, monitor or sense a process variable. For example, a process variable may be transmitted to a control room by a transmitter for use in controlling the process or for providing information about process operation to a controller. 20 For example, information related to pressure of process fluid may be transmitted to a control room and used to control the process, such as oil refining.

One typical prior art technique for transmitting information involves controlling the 25 amount of power flowing through a process control loop. Current is supplied from a current source in the control room and the transmitter controls the current from its location in the field. For example, a 4 mA signal can be used to indicate a zero reading and a 20

mA signal can be used to indicate a full scale reading. More recently, transmitters have employed digital circuitry which communicates with the control room using a digital signal which is superimposed onto the analog current signal flowing through the process control loop. One example of such a technique is the HART® communication protocol developed by Rosemount Inc. The HART® protocol and other such protocols typically include a set of commands or instructions which can be sent to the transmitter to elicit a desired response, such as transmitter control or interrogation.

Fieldbus is a communications protocol proposed by the Fieldbus Foundation and is directed to defining a communications layer or protocol for transmitting information on a process control loop. In the Fieldbus protocol, the current flowing through the loop is not used to transmit an analog signal. Instead, all information is digitally transmitted by modulating current flowing in the process control loop. Further, the Fieldbus Standard, and a standard known as Profibus, allow transmitters to be configured in a multi-drop configuration in which more than one transmitter is connected on the same process control loop. Other communication protocols include the MODBUS® protocol and Ethernet. In some configurations, two, three, four or any number of wires can be used to connect to the process device, including non-physical connections such as RF (radio frequency).

Some process transmitters are also capable of transmitting an alarm signal which can provide an indication that the process variable measurement is saturated (i.e. process upset). One type of alarm signal fixes the current through the loop at predetermined levels or outside of predetermined threshold values. For example, one type of alarm signal is a current level which is greater than 21 mA or less than 3.8 mA can be used to send a "high alarm" or a "low alarm", respectively. The alarm signal can be sent by the transmitter upon the occurrence of an alarm condition.

SUMMARY

A device for use in a process control system includes output circuitry configured to couple to the process control loop and control electrical current through the loop. Loop override circuitry is configured to override operation of the output circuitry and set the electrical current in the loop to a desired level.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a diagram which illustrates a process control system including a process device which couples to a process control loop.

Figure 2 is a perspective view which illustrates within the process device of Figure 1.

Figure 3 is a simplified block diagram of circuitry in the process device.

Figure 4 is a simplified block diagram of circuitry including a comparator for implementing diagnostic circuitry.

Figure 5 is a simplified block diagram of circuitry including an analog to digital converter for implementing diagnostic circuitry.

Figure 6A is a simplified electrical diagram showing loop override circuitry connected in parallel with output circuitry.

Figure 6B is a simplified electrical diagram showing loop override circuitry connected in series with output circuitry.

Figure 7 is a more detailed block diagram of electrical circuitry in the process device of Figure 1.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The present invention provides loop override circuitry which is configured to override operation of output circuitry in a process device. The invention can be implemented in any process device which is used to control current in a process control loop and is not limited to the illustrative process device discussed herein. For example, one process device described herein is a transmitter which includes a sensor for sensing a process variable. However, it is not necessary for a process device to sense a process variable to implement various aspects of this invention. The loop override circuitry is capable of sending an alarm signal (or

other) on a process control loop, even upon a failure of other circuitry in the process device. This allows the device to send an alarm signal which might otherwise go undetected (unannounced). In another
5 embodiment, a technique is provided for detecting the loss of the ability of the device to control the loop current.

Figure 1 is a diagram of process control system 10 which includes a transmitter 12 connected
10 to process pipe 16. Transmitter 12 is coupled to a two-wire process control loop 18 which operates in accordance with the FOUNDATION™ Fieldbus, Profibus, or HART® standard. However, the invention is not limited to these standards or a two-wire
15 configuration. Two-wire process control loop 18 runs between transmitter 12 and the control room 20. In an embodiment in which loop 18 operates in accordance with the HART® protocol, loop 18 can carry a current I which is representative of a sensed process
20 variable. Additionally, the HART® protocol allows a digital signal to be superimposed on the current through loop 18 such that digital information can be sent to or received from transmitter 12. When
operating in accordance with the Fieldbus Standard,
25 loop 18 carries a digital signal and can be coupled to multiple field devices such as other transmitters.

Figure 2 is a perspective view of transmitter 12 which shows one example configuration of circuitry blocks carried therein. In this example

embodiment, transmitter 12 includes a feature module 40 which couples to a sensing module 42. The sensing module 42 couples to process piping 16 (shown in Figure 1) through manifold process coupling 44.

5 Feature module 40 includes feature module electronic circuitry 50 which couples to sensing module electronic circuitry 52 carried in sensing module 42. Typically, the sensing module electronic circuitry 52 couples to a process variable sensor,
10 for example sensor 21 shown in Figure 1, which is used to sense a process variable related to operation of the process. Feature module electronic circuitry 50 includes output circuitry 60, loop override circuitry 62, and diagnostic circuitry 64. The
15 circuitry 60, 62 and 64 can be implemented in hardware, software or a hybrid combination of the two and can be located anywhere within transmitter 12.

 During operation, output circuitry 60 controls the value of the current I flowing through
20 loop 18 to represent, for example, a measured process variable. This can be used to monitor or control operation of an industrial process. In some applications, output circuitry 60 is also used to provide power to circuitry within transmitter 12
25 which is generated using power received over loop 18. In some applications, such as for obtaining a Safety Integrity Level (SIL) certification, it is necessary for the transmitter 12 to meet certain reliability criteria. For example, in order to ensure that a

process is shut down upon a failure or impending failure, some certifications require that an alarm signal be properly sent so that a safety shut down can occur even if some of the components have failed
5 in transmitter 12.

According to one aspect of the present invention, diagnostic circuitry 64 may provide diagnostics which are used to detect internal failure modes of transmitter 12 and/or external influences
10 such as starvation or EMI, which are described later. The diagnostic circuitry 64 can detect a failure or impending failure of the output circuitry 60. The diagnostic circuitry 64 is used to activate loop override circuitry 62 which overrides operation of
15 output circuitry 60 and places an alarm current level on loop 18. For example, the loop override circuitry 62 can set the loop current to a predetermined value. In a 4-20 mA current loop, the current I can be set to a value less than 3.8 mA or greater than 21 mA by
20 loop override circuitry 62 to thereby send an alarm signal on loop 18. These current levels are referred to as "low alarm" and "high alarm", respectively. However, the current can be set to any level as desired, including to a level which represents a
25 process variable.

Figure 3 is a simplified block diagram of transmitter 12. As shown in Figure 3, transmitter 12 includes measurement circuitry 70 which couples to process variable sensor 21. Circuitry 70 can be

included on sensor module circuitry 52 shown in Figure 2. An output stage 72 connects to measurement circuitry 70 and is configured for sending (and, in some embodiments, receiving) information on process control loop 18. The output stage 72 includes loop override circuitry 62 and output circuitry 60. However, circuitry 60 and 62 can be configured in accordance with other embodiments. The measurement circuitry 70 is configured to provide initial processing of process variables sensed by sensor 21. The implementation of measurement circuitry 70 frequently includes a microprocessor. The microprocessor may also be used to implement other circuit functionality shown in Figure 3.

During normal operation, the process variable sensed by sensor 21 is converted into an analog current level or a digital signal for transmission on process control loop 18 using output circuitry 60. However, when an alarm condition is sensed by diagnostic circuitry 64, loop override circuitry 62 is configured to override the output generated by output circuitry 60 and drive the current level I carried in loop 18 to a predetermined alarm level, for example, above or below a predetermined threshold level. The loop override circuitry 62 can be connected in series or parallel with output circuitry 60 or included in circuitry 60. Other configurations can also be used. In some embodiments, the loop override circuitry 62 is

configured to switch off or otherwise disconnect output circuitry 60 or other components in transmitter 12.

5 The diagnostic circuitry 64 can sense an alarm condition as desired by the user. The diagnostic circuitry 64 can operate in accordance with any diagnostic technique and is not limited to those set forth specifically herein. For example, the diagnostic circuitry 64 can be configured to sense
10 the quiescent current draw of individual components within transmitter 12, or of all of the components within transmitter 12. The onset of many failure mechanisms can be recognized by an increase in the quiescent "operating" current level. This is
15 described in U.S. patent application Serial No. 10/635,944, filed August 7, 2003, entitled PROCESS DEVICE WITH QUIESCENT CURRENT DIAGNOSTICS. Example failures which can be detected based upon quiescent current draw include latent failures due to
20 electrostatic discharge damage, component damage due to lightning or transient electrical events, leakage in semiconductors, for example zener diodes, leakage of filter components such as capacitors, leakage due to dendrite growth or corrosion, or other failures or
25 impending failures.

A quiescent current diagnostic capability allows prediction and/or detection of the inability to control process loop current I , due to increases

in quiescent current, thereby initiating loop override circuitry 62.

The quiescent current diagnostic is particularly advantageous for devices which communicate exclusively in a digital format, for example Fieldbus. On such as a device, if the quiescent current level prevents transmission of a digital signal, the device has no other means by which to transmit process-related information. Therefore, with such a quiescent current diagnostic configuration, transmitter 12 can transmit an indication of an impending failure, prior to ultimate failure. In one embodiment, loop override circuitry 62 can disconnect transmitter 12 communication circuits from process control loop 18. In another embodiment, when quiescent current draw has reached a level at which transmitter 12 or process control loop 18 will cease to function, loop override circuitry 62 can disconnect transmitter 12 from process control loop 18, so that process control loop 18 can continue to operate.

Figure 4 is a simplified block diagram showing one embodiment of diagnostic circuitry 64. In Figure 4, a comparator 74 is used to sense a voltage drop across a resistor 76 which is connected in series with loop current I. The comparator 74 can be configured to detect variations in the loop current beyond predetermined threshold levels and responsively provide a signal to the loop override

circuitry 62. In response to the signal from comparator 74, loop override circuitry 62 overrides the normal operation of output circuitry 60 and drives the loop current I to an alarm level. The
5 comparator 74 can comprise multiple comparators, for example, to detect current excursions beyond an upper and a lower threshold. The reference input to comparator 74 can be generated using any appropriate means, for example, a resistor ladder network, diode,
10 or other techniques. The output of comparator 74 is illustrated as coupled to loop override circuitry 62. The loop override 62 can include a microprocessor which receives the output from comparator 74, or the output from comparator 74 can be used to directly
15 control the loop override circuitry 62 electrical components.

Figure 5 is a simplified diagram showing another embodiment of the present invention in which diagnostic circuitry 64 is formed using an analog to
20 digital converter 80 connected across the resistor 76. As discussed above, resistor 76 is coupled in series with loop 18 such that the voltage drop across resistor 76 is indicative of the loop current I. The output from analog to digital converter 80 can couple
25 to loop override circuitry 62 or to a microprocessor 138 shown in Figure 7. The microprocessor compares the digitized loop current value with thresholds stored in a memory and responsively activates loop override circuitry 62 to drive the loop current to an

alarm signal level. The threshold values can be, for example, stored in a memory. Additionally, the diagnostic circuitry 64 can monitor the loop current I to detect trends in the loop current value.

5 Aberrations in the loop current trends, for example, those due to starvation or electromagnetic interference (EMI) can be used to activate the loop override circuitry 62. If there is insufficient terminal voltage (starvation), output circuitry 60

10 may be unable to achieve a desired output. The presence of significant levels of electromagnetic interference may cause a shift in loop current I. In another example, the microprocessor can compare the digitized loop current value with expected loop

15 current value. For example, the expected loop current value can be the value that the loop current should be set to for a particular value of the sensed process variable. If the sensed loop current value varies from the expected loop current value by more

20 than a predetermined amount, for example a percentage, the microprocessor can trigger operation of the loop override circuitry 62.

Figures 6A and 6B are two simplified block diagrams showing example configurations of output

25 circuitry 60 and loop override circuitry 62. In Figure 6A, loop override circuitry 62 is connected in parallel with output circuitry 60. An optional connection between loop override circuitry 62 and output circuitry 60 is shown which, in some

embodiments, allows loop override circuitry 62 to shut off or otherwise disconnect output circuitry 60 from loop 18. In Figure 6B, loop override circuitry 62 is illustrated as connected in series with output circuitry 60. An optional connection between loop override circuitry 62 and output circuitry 60 can be used to disconnect output circuitry 60 from loop 18 or bypass output circuitry 60. Other configurations can also be used such as a series-parallel connection, or embodiments in which output circuitry 60 and loop override circuitry 62 share some or all components. The device can be electrically disconnected from the loop, for example, by using one or more switches or fuses.

Once the inability to control the loop current is detected by the diagnostic circuitry 64, the loop override circuitry 62 is used to ensure that the transmitter 12 outputs a valid alarm signal. For example, when the loop override circuitry 62 is connected in parallel with output circuitry 60 as shown in Figure 6A, the loop override circuitry 62 can shunt additional current such that the total loop current is greater than 21 mA to indicate a high alarm signal. In another example embodiment, the loop override circuitry 62 includes a disconnect mechanism such that the offending circuitry can be disconnected thereby allowing signaling of either a high alarm signal or a low alarm signal. In such an embodiment, the disconnect circuitry can be connected in series

with the offending circuitry. In another embodiment, loop override circuitry 62 can include a second (or backup) loop control circuit, which can be used to control loop current if desired. In another example
5 embodiment, the diagnostic circuitry 64 includes a watch dog circuit 150 which must be periodically triggered by a microprocessor or other means within the transmitter 12. The watchdog circuit 150 can detect failures including hardware or software
10 failures. If the watch dog circuit 150 is not triggered within the preset time limit, the loop override circuitry 62 can be activated to thereby send a high or low alarm signal.

Figure 7 is a more detailed block diagram
15 showing one example of circuitry in transmitter 12. In Figure 7, feature module electronics 50 is shown coupled to two wire process control loop 18 through a shunt regulator 100 and a loop feedback resistor 104. A power regulator 110 couples to sensor module
20 electronics 52. Sensor module electronics 52 is also shown coupled to the process through a process variable sensor 112. An optional output display 114 is also shown.

The loop override circuitry 62 can be
25 partially implemented in microcontroller 138 which couples to a digital to analog (D/A) converter 122 and an analog to digital (A/D) converter 64. Analog to digital converter 64 is configured to measure the

loop current and can also implement the functionality of diagnostic circuitry 64.

In operation, the microcontroller 138 is configured to control the current I through loop 18, and any digital data modulated onto that current, using D/A 122 and shunt regulator 100. The analog to digital converter 64 provides an output which is indicative of the current I flowing through loop 18. The analog to digital converter 64 can also be connected to provide an output related to the quiescent (operating) current drawn by transmitter 12 or components within transmitter 12. The microcontroller 138 includes a memory 140 which can contain threshold values used in detecting an alarm condition. By periodically comparing the measured loop current with the threshold values stored in memory 140 or with the expected value of the loop current based upon the sensed process variable, the microcontroller 138 can determine if an alarm condition has occurred. Of course, other alarm conditions can be detected as desired and the invention is not limited to those set forth herein.

Upon the detection of an alarm condition, the microcontroller 138 transmits an alarm signal on process control loop 18 by activating loop override circuitry 62. The current I flowing through loop 18 is then set to a fixed current level. In some embodiments, circuitry within the device can be disconnected or shut off in order to provide enough

power to other circuitry to provide a desired output. One technique to provide a loop override is to disconnect the device, or otherwise take the device offline from the process control loop.

5 Figure 7 also illustrates a watch dog circuit 150 coupled to microcontroller 138. The watch dog circuit 150 must be periodically triggered by microcontroller 138. If microcontroller 138 stops triggering watch dog circuit 150, it can be assumed
10 that a failure has occurred. Examples include, but are not limited to, improper program flow, microprocessor or memory failure, clock errors, etc. If watch dog circuit 150 is not triggered, watch dog circuit 150 sends a signal to loop override circuitry
15 62 to cause loop override circuitry 62 to drive an alarm current level on the process control loop 18.

 Although the present invention has been described with reference to preferred embodiments, workers skilled in the art will recognize that
20 changes may be made in form and detail without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. The above description illustrates the invention in one example configuration and any appropriate process control loop may be used such as 4-20 mA, 2, 3, or 4
25 wire loop, multi-drop loop and a loop operating in accordance with Fieldbus, Profibus, HART® or other communication protocol which transmits process-related information by controlling current flow in a process control loop. The present invention can be particularly

useful in a Safety Instrumented System (SIS) configuration which provides an additional safety layer to a process control loop. The invention can provide a technique of improving the Safety Integrity Level (SIL) rating of a process device. These techniques can be used to convert an undetected failure or potentially unsafe condition into a detected failure which occurs in accordance with a safe condition. Thereby increasing the Safe Failure Fraction (SFF) for process devices used in Safety Instrumented Systems (SIS). The present invention can be used in conjunction with techniques set forth in U.S. Application No. 10/_____, filed November 21, 2003 and entitled PROCESS DEVICE WITH SUPERVISORY OVERLAYER.